

82nd Anniversary Sermon

The Church of the Holy Apostles and the Mediator
Philadelphia

October 22, 1950

Text: Ephesians 4:11-14

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

In this wonderful chapter, the fourth chapter of Ephesians, St. Paul has a marvelous and prophetic vision of the work of the Church. It would be well for everyone of us to read over this chapter at the beginning of a new year in the Church's life as a goal to which we all must work. There is no place here for self glorification because to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called we must have lowliness and meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace: all this is because there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Within the Church itself there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the Body of Christ. The purpose accomplished and the goal to be reached is the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man under the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Until we set these standards before us, there can be little hope of an enduring work. Insofar as any rector, pastor, or teacher works towards these ends, his work is sure to be blessed by God.

This parish of the Holy Apostles and the Mediator, more than any other perhaps in the Church, has had running through it the influence, prayers, and labor of one man: George C. Thomas and of his faithful wife, Ada Morehead Thomas. It is not only their gifts to the Church which were generous but their personal service

through the Sunday School and through real pastoral work they did among the families of the parish. Pastors and teachers they were and faithful in every duty.

The late Nathanael S. Thomas, Bishop of Wyoming & for many years rector of Holy Apostles, speaks of Mr. Thomas in this way:

"I have heard him dwell most lovingly upon our Lord's constant care of, what most people call, little things, and the pains which he took with individuals, e.g., with the woman at the well, with Martha or Nicodemus. He was fond of referring to the fact that St. Luke wrote his Gospel and the Acts for the edification of one friend, and that in doing so he set us an example of the importance of doing thoroughly whatever we undertake.

"And so in the footsteps of his Master, we find him ever delighting in the details of personal ministration. Mr. Thomas knew all his scholars by name, and visited the sick and suffering in their homes. I shall never forget a remark he made to me as we were sitting together on his porch at Chestnut Hill, after my nomination, but before my acceptance of the call to become Rector of this parish. We were speaking of personal service. In a most humble way, and with a face aglow with emotion, he said, "Do you know I believe there are few homes in our entire parish in which, within the past thirty years, I have not said prayers with some sick person?" He might have added, what I have since learned, that it was his wont to cheer every sick room, not only with his presence, but with some token of regard, usually a large bouquet of roses or carnations."

Such service is very unusual on the part of the laymen in any Church.

One of the guiding influences in George Thomas' life was his association with the great Phillips Brooks who was his rector at the Church of the Holy Trinity.

"When Phillips Brooks first asked Mr. Thomas to take charge of the Sunday-school of the Church of the Holy Apostles, and Mr. Thomas protested leaving his class of young men at Holy Trinity, he said, 'Well, take it now, and I will find some one to take your place after awhile.' Twenty years later he said with a smile, putting his hand on Mr. Thomas' shoulder, 'You see, I have never been able to find the man to take your place.' "

No one ever has been able to take the place of Mr. George C. Thomas in the life of the General Church, of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, or particularly in the Parish of the Holy Apostles and the Mediator. What is the reason for an influence which has carried on to these many years? It must have been that people found in George Thomas something else besides a wizard of finance, an able administrator, and an inimitable story teller. Somehow the sense of a larger partnership than that of Drexel and Company entered into the soul of this able businessman. It was a partnership which he had with God. He consecrated a great part of his wealth to the missionary work of the Church and the building up of religious education. He was a steward who was found faithful in the exercise of his time as well as of his philanthropy.

Of the rectors of the church that served with Mr. Thomas, I can remember three very well who became Bishops: Nathanael S. Thomas who became Bishop of Wyoming and with whom I was associated in the work of the continental domestic Missionary Bishops when I was Suffragan of South Dakota and afterwards as Bishop of Eastern Oregon; the Rt. Rev. Wilson R. Stearly who succeeded Bishop Thomas and who became Bishop of Newark following Bishop Lines; and the Rt. Rev. William Theodotus Capers who became Bishop of West Texas after a short period of service in Holy Apostles. I am sure the congregation will pardon me for bringing up these personal remembrances as they are indelibly fixed upon my memory and have been influential in my ministry. These rectors and their assistants lived in ~~daily~~ *frequent* contact with George Thomas and were helped by him in molding the policies of this parish. I can't remember any feeling that any one of them had that this rich, capable layman was directing them in their ministries. He, too, recognized that God had given some apostles and prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers all for the perfecting of the saints and for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the Body of Christ. If a man went to Mr. Thomas and, as he believed, spoke the truth in love, there was always a hearing and the eventual

decision could be carried right up to the Head of the Church, even Christ.

No anniversary would be complete without ~~sence~~ some consideration of the future. On All Saints' Day in Old St. Peter's Church we are going to celebrate the founding of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society. I hope many of you will be present on that occasion. In 1835 the Church held a Convention in St. Peter's in Philadelphia. There were two great decisions which God's Holy Spirit gave to the mind of the Church. The first one was that every baptized member was responsible for the preaching of the Gospel and the second was that the Church must go through its ministers (ambassadors) and Bishops to the uttermost parts of the earth. There is a definition of the Church which I think needs to be remembered. Jesus described the Church as the Body of Christ. We might further add that that means a group of interrelated cells whose function it is to portray the life and character and teachings of Christ and so to fulfill His purpose in the world. The Church is an organism not an organization. The Church comes to life only when it expresses Christ and fulfills His purpose. This little poem I have found which beautifully expresses this idea:

"Not merely in the words you say,
Not only in your deeds confessed,
But in the most unconsciouſ way
Is Christ expressed.

"For me 'twas not the truth you taught,
To you so clear, to me so dim,
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of Him.

"And from your eyes He beckons me,
And from your heart His love is shed,
Till I lose sight of you and see
The Christ instead."

The youth of the Church have caught this splendid wisdom for their motto is: "To know Christ and to make Him known." The Church must be in the world but not of it. In this sense it is ecclesia; a group chosen out of the world which has a message to carry. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the Church: He blesses it

and makes it a holy thing, but He does so only through human instruments not by magic.

The influence of a group of men and women such as have served the Parish of the Holy Apostles and the Mediator will always abide as long as they have been instruments of God and of His Christ and not merely receptacles. One of the finest things that St. Paul ever said to his converts was this: "Ye are my epistles." Everything that you or I do as members of the Church are the words of God or the words of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Nothing is more needed throughout the world today than examples. We cannot say one thing and live another. The Christian life should be a radiant and glowing thing which is like a torch passed on to others. So many young people are saying: Why should I want to be a Christian? I know a lot of Church members who are no better than I am and they don't seem to have much fun out of life whereas I don't ^{make} many very many professions, but I get a wonderful kick out of the things I do."

One of the greatest hymns of the Church has a verse which reads thus:

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day."

The memory of any person will never be forgotten nor fade with the opening day if after he has passed into the Other Life anyone can say of him or her: I found in that person a reflection of Christ.

Sermon preached by the Rev. John H.A. Bomberger, D.D.
on Anniversary Sunday at the Church of the Holy Apostles and
the Mediator, Sunday, October 28, 1951

The words that I have chosen for our text seem to me to be appropriate as we meet together as a great parish family on this Anniversary Day. A part of the 18th verse of the 16th Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel are the words of Christ - some of the words - "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

It is true very often that in our exegesis or the interpretation of many texts in the Bible, those who would understand it sometimes emphasize that which is unimportant - the incidental and the side issue of a text. And I think this text is one of them. There has been so much discussion about that phrase which goes before these immediate words - "Thou art Peter and upon this rock--" that we have overlooked the important thing. The thing which Christ said was, "I will build My Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." I, therefore, want to direct our thoughts to this particular aspect, the more or less neglected aspect of the text, that Christ said, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Well now, what is the first thought that comes to mind from those very definite and emphatic words? Most of the people, if not all people, think of the Church today as fighting a purely defensive warfare. I think that is pretty true to say when you look at the attitude and sense the feeling that many people have about the Church. Well, I want the Church, it's there, and I feel safe when it is in my community. But, that's about as far as it goes. Somehow or other it's kind of a fortress to which people may turn - to which they may run in time of danger. And it's there simply for defense. They get the conception that the forces of evil are on the move and the Church is entrenched behind fortifications to repel the attacked. Well, that's not the way our Lord thinks about His Church. He said His Church was here and it was to be on the march, and it was to attack Hell - the gates of Hell would not be able to prevail against it. It was to be on the march and it was an attacking body. It is here, not entrenched behind gates, but it is here to withstand and to attack the assaults of evil wherever it is found in the world. Don't forget this, He intimated that evil would at last be beaten and that the forces of evil will eventually be destroyed because the forces of evil will never be strong enough to prevail against it. Now that is what Christ's conception and idea of the Church is, and I want to speak to you and I will try to be brief about the implications for the Church of our day from this great teaching of Christ about the Church. First, there is this implication, if that is true (and it is true) the Church in relation to our world must have a world-wide mission. If it is to be an aggressive Church and on the march and on the move, that means that there is no place on the face of this earth where the Church is not to enter. If the Church were to cease to be missionary she would cease to be aggressive and if she were not aggressive, then she could not be Christian. Now that is the first great implication of the words that Christ spoke - "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

The Church must continue to attack hedonism, evil, to extend its frontier so that wherever evil exists it's sphere of influence can be felt and can be marshalled against that evil. Now if we had the time to review the great periods of History, you will find that the periods of intense missionary activities - those periods of intense missionary activity have coincided with periods of intense vitality in the Church's life. Now you review those periods in History, but the Church entrenched and on the defensive is never the Church at its best. When it's aggressive - when it's intense in its purpose and its aims, then it becomes something of intense vitality and light in the world. There are just one or two significant things in our time that indicate that individuals - I mean individuals within this Church, - there is the Reconstruction and Advancement Movement within our Church today. And the great Forward in Service Movement, which has startled many people, people who have lapsed within the Church into great action and interest and intense desire to see that the Church keeps on the move and it's time that we had such a movement within the Church.

For the past 25 years we have been holding the line while other institutions in our social and economic life have made untold progress. My friends, it is time to stop holding the line. It is time to realize that the Church must be aggressive. It must be missionary in its outlook. It may take a long time or a short time depending upon how the Church meets the issue. And so, we have got to make the decision. These movements are something, just things within the life of the Church to spur us on to that which is basic and fundamental, - that God's Holy Spirit is within the Church but that He does not mean to take our responsibilities and our initiative away from us. He is waiting for us to respond and to unite our strength and our talents to His will so that as used to be said a generation ago - "The Church may win the world to Christ in this generation." And it is perfectly possible. Then there is another encouraging sign of our time and of interest in that the Church is moving more and more in the direction of Church Unity. We pray every morning and everytime we have our prayers in the Church for the Church Universal that the divisions which exist among us may someday be closed and that way we may unite in a great and magnificent unity for the work of the Church on the march, because God wills unity for His Church. That is perfectly clear. And so, my friends, we are nearer, I am sure today, to unity within the Church more possibly than we have ever been before. Then, again the sooner that unity comes to pass, the sooner will the evil that is in the world and the moral depravity that exists be wiped out and the Church take her rightful place and the gates of Hell shall be broken down. And then there is this great implication about the Church - there are innumerable definitions in the New Testament and the Old Testament about the Church, but I like the one of St. Paul from his letter to the 1st Corinthians "Now ye are the body of Christ" and then this, "And members in particular" and that is the final thing which I want to stress on this Anniversary Day.

We sometimes forget as one of the things growing out of our text that the Church which Christ established is for all men - for all men not only for those we personally like - but for all who love God.

That's the great objective of the Church that all peoples may come and participate and be living members of Christ's Church, and it makes no difference who we think we are, the Church is for the average common people, that's what it was provided for - the Church is that kind of society. The difficulty is that when you use the word society you think of a preferred group. No, it means a community, a fellowship of all people everywhere and the Church is not exclusive. It is inclusive. It takes in everyone, and that is why we have this book which is called the Book of Common Prayer. It is for all people, for everyone, and the Church needs everyman. Now it naturally follows from that that Christ is not so much concerned with perfection of achievement (I'd suspect we would all like to be saints and I'm quite sure that many of us are on the road to becoming saints right in this life), but He does expect something of the bent of personality or the direction we are taking in the world today and in the life of the Church. That is the important thing about being a member of the body of Christ and members in particular.

Now the question is often put before us just that way, that we are asked if we are members of the Church and we look askance and say, "Well, that's too much for me - being a member of the Church." Or we are afraid to meet that which is needed of us to carry on the life of the work of the Church. The only thing it seems to me that is necessary and important is this, that the ordinary person who acknowledges Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and struggles within the fellowship to measure up to that effort to be devoted to his Lord and Master, that person is the man in whom Christ puts His trust and that is the thing that is the integral part a person who is willing to be faithful with what he has and the things that he has to use and continues to acknowledge that he is a follower of the law and of his Master Jesus Christ. That brings me to this great fact, that the Church is made up of people, as we have said, and the history of the Church is the record of individuals who have dedicated themselves and their lives to the cause and what they can do.

And now that brings me very naturally to our great benefactor - the great layman inspired of God, who in his time, almost fifty years ago or more, simply wanted to dedicate himself in a very humble way, it seems, to the fact that he would always be loyal to the cause of the Church. He certainly must have believed what Christ said that the gates of Hell could never prevail against the Church if - if the Church is aggressive and on the march. And I have no doubt there might have been a time in the life of George C. Thomas, when he was a young man perhaps, when he may have felt unequal to the dream and the desire he had to be a part of a Church that is on the march. But the thought grew up with him and became apparent that he was not alone and that he could do what others had done in the past, individuals, very definitely individuals whom he knew who had stood up for the faith and the standards and the power of the one who is able to overcome all that which is contrary to the life of the Church and of Her founder. I don't know whether we should talk of him or speak of him as a unique personality because we are all more or less unique. God has given us - each one of us - certain talents. He has given us strength, he has given us money and innumerable things to be used and I suspect that when we use them for his work then it is that we might talk about them as ourselves as being unique. It is a perfectly normal and natural thing to do. He felt that and the value of

everyone who was a member of that Church. Do not ever think of him as thinking of the Church as a fortress - not at all. He went out and won people individually because they were potential members of Christ's Church to a certain unit within the Church - the parish of the Holy Apostles. It is perfectly amazing the time which that consecrated man devoted to personal work. I have had innumerable people, as recently as last week, come to me and say, "Well, I can never estimate what that Church has done for me and meant to me. The sad thing about a statement like this is when a person may then seem to think that their work has been completed. Many of them are no longer interested - they carry away with them the imprimatur, so to speak, of that great layman's life. The letters that he wrote - I have seen them; the personal interest that he took in those who were presented for Confirmation, writing them a personal letter and always seeming to stress this of which I speak, to be a faithful and loyal and devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and in substance to remember that you belong to a Church which is on the march and that when you become a part of it, its real power will reach out into the world and bring others to realize that it suffers when they have no interest. You can't imagine the Church working otherwise. Do you think for a moment that the Good Shepherd would have said, "Hear all ye foolish sheep, I have prepared a comfortable home or fold for you where there is food and congenial companionship? Come and get it." No, He did not say that. He said He was the Shepherd - the Good Shepherd - who was to go out to seek those who had strayed from the fold and to bring them in and consequently He went forth. Well, my friends, that is my message to you. There is no good or there is no sense to our meeting in the Church this morning unless we believe that it is not a place where we are entrenched but rather a place where we receive the inspiration and the power and the strength to go out into the world. And so I simply ask you to try to realize today that the Church is Christ in action and although every power of God is in the Church, never question that, not until all the people are in the Church - all the people, mind you, not until all the people living right around you, maybe next door to you who do not go to Church, not until they are in the Church, will the real power of which Christ spoke reach out into the world and bring to pass sooner - even sooner than we hope, the destruction - the breakdown of the gates of Hell.

SERMON DELIVERED OCTOBER 27, 1957

AT

CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES AND THE MEDIATOR

51st and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Rev. J. H. A. Bomberger, Rector

on the occasion of

The 89th Anniversary of the founding of
this Parish and the 41st Anniversary
of the laying of the cornerstone
of this Church

BY

DR. JOHN ROBBINS HART

Rector of

THE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL CHAPEL

VALLEY FORGE, PENNA.

89TH ANNIVERSARY SERMON BY DR. JOHN R. HART

CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES AND

THE MEDIATOR

As always, Dr. Bomberger made the invitation very gracious and appealing, and I was delighted to accept his invitation to deliver the Sermon at this significant Anniversary Service. Ever since my ordination I have come to this church at least once a year and I am glad to come home today.

Holy Apostles, in my student days, had the greatest influence on all of us and to which our Rector has already made reference. I cherish the warm family manner in which we all have been united. Then, too, Mrs. Volkmar, who is present today with her grandchildren, gave me a very warm invitation to be here. Mrs. Volkmar assisted me with my work at the University, and that which is near to her heart, her family remembrances, I trust I think about and feel in the deepest areas of my life at this time.

We mention the name of George C. Thomas and know that in the full civic life, as well as the life of the Church, he was the one who always seemed to be leading the way. This marvelous life extended in all directions, and he had such a diversity of gifts that many, many people in all classes of society, I am sure, still feel his deep and abiding goodness and help. Many would like to say the word of tribute to him. As a patron of the arts and espec-

ially devoted to music he contributed that which we so greatly need. Finer thoughts and finer feelings about our faith and how it is in our hearts he always expressed. Don't forget that Russia and Germany under Hitler, after many centuries of Christianity, turned down the faith which we follow and many other people are so doing. I fear it is partly because we have quantity of religion instead of quality of religion, and I am tremendously concerned about the quality. The one whom we remember and revere this morning, I am sure, was greatly concerned about it. In his deference and reference and refinement of thought and feeling he would want us to get our thoughts and our emotional life expressed just the right way as we carry our faith to all the world.

When there is a brilliance of thought and true feeling, people do respond. Let us think of that as we preserve and promote "the faith once for all delivered to the Saints". In his autobiography, Albert Schweitzer is very much concerned about our elemental thinking, and he writes: "Our thinking today is not up to our task" - our thinking today is not good enough to do the work that we have to do. What a great call that is to think correctly. This is a precision age. We work with precision instruments handled by precision people. Let us make the thought of our faith just as precise and correct.

Let us also think clearly, because, even though at times we may think accurately, we do not think clearly enough or express ourselves clearly enough to help people. Samuel Johnson once said so many people think obscurely, therefor they cannot speak clearly. Correctness and clarity and great diversity of thinking have always been the marks of a good mind. Let us have this better thinking and deep

feeling in our service of commemoration and gratitude to George C. Thomas and to Mrs. Thomas with other significant responsibilities and services. A lady of great charm who was loved by all privileged to know her. Mrs. Thomas was described by a person who knew her as "the finest, and most splendid woman we have ever known. It was a privilege to have been her friend. Such sweetness and gentleness, and always thoughtfulness touched my heart. I treasure her memory".

Each one can be a good historian. He need not have all the refinements of learning of a scholar in order to live in the days of our forefathers who are dear to our hearts. We all should know how to bind the past and present together and enjoy the life that has gone before as well as the life today. Jean Paul Richter once said "Remembrance is the only paradise out of which we cannot be driven". "The paradise of remembrance" I am here to exalt this morning. We shall go back to the early days of this old church, this family, and those who have cared enough to give, and give so generously, that we may enjoy what we have today. It is indeed a superficial person who has no interest in the days that are gone, whose capacity for remembrance, for commemoration, for good anniversaries, is not developed. We enjoy the guidance of the Bible and it is always turning back the leaves as well as looking forward. Think of how those ancient Jews, who gave us the foundation of the sacred book, talked of their forefathers. As the chosen people of God they initiated the religion that has stood the test of time. Our Lord tried so hard to show the leaders of that ancient church that he was not departing from the faith of the Old Testament, but was building new things into it. He spent a lot of his ministry in an attempt to reconcile differences and continue the

tradition in unity and harmony. Ancient truth and persons for whom deference and reverence should be shown he never neglected. We are doing this at Holy Apostles and the Mediator this morning.

The keystone of the arch of all remembrance is found in our Lord's words, the center of our life of worship - "this do in remembrance of me". May we find that spirit always, not to branch out into something that has no connection with the past but something built on the ancient foundations, our Lord being the chief cornerstone, as was so well read to us earlier in the service. I love to test myself as to whether I am loyal and devoted and keenly aware of what has been done through the ages for me - "lest we forget". Let's not forget but be deep enough to love enough, to care enough, to keep it ever and ever before us. It had substantial value in the past and is our guide for the future.

Then I would say also, that when remembrance and commemoration have to do with people and with God, they really become communion. They are communions, not just remembrances; and we are saying in these days, I hope, with greater and greater meaning, "I believe in the communion of Saints". I want that communion. I am not separated from those whom I love. Cardinal Newman was in some distress when he wrote the beautiful hymn in which are the words "which I have loved long since and lost a while". He did not mean that he had lost them - lost a while, but not lost.

They are kept for us in the Great Divine Conservation of Life. By the exercise of our capacity and our power for communion, the Holy Communion with God, and with those we love, wherever they may be in this world or the world beyond, we grow into a deep spiritual

life. I wish we could say that better. What a glorious word "communion" is and how the church has used it to such great advantage, and how it leads us into the mysticism, where the natural and the spiritual worlds come together, and it tells us that we can be nearer those whom we love if we practice this wonderful spirit of communion. We hear of many things that are psychic and spiritualistic that we do not believe in and that we do not think are true, but there has never been any objection to this wonderful word "communion". Close your eyes, shut out the world, stop the five senses, let your mind and soul go out into the invisible world, and in that great silence and tranquility things will come to you, loved ones will seem very close, and the living presence of God will be there. The "touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still" will be there. The voice will not be too still, those hands will not be too far away, but very close, the way our hearts want them to be; and by the discipline and control and severe practice of the body and soul and heart what a wonderful communion we can always have. Time has nothing to do with it, it is a part of eternity, it is the thing we believe in or we would not be in this church this morning. The psalmist expressed it beautifully - "Be still and know that I am God". People who are still know that truth and they know that loved ones are very near.

The cloud of witnesses always around us we commemorate at this season of All Saints Day. When the higher mental processes go to work and your soul is released and the world is shut out, then you are always in a Holy Communion in the remembrance of all whom you love, and the great, great spiritual world is nearer to you than ever before. I plead for that. I beg you not to be neglectful of it.

The light of your eyes or the expression of your face will show that you have been with God and those you love.

Many years ago Edward Young, English Poet and Dean of Salisbury said, among other beautiful things, "Knock at the door of your heart and see if your thoughts are at home". That is where we want our thoughts to be. We are fearful of people who only think, who only use their brains and not their hearts. They would destroy us and the world if we let them go on. But, as the Bible has always taught us, and as our Lord lived and died for it, the heart as much as the mind must be allowed to express itself. Then things are right. Let us knock at the door of our hearts in this beautiful service. Be thankful we can have a part in it and if our thoughts are at home where they belong - in our hearts - we have nothing to fear. We shall go out of these church doors and reveal to the world what it means to believe, to know why we believe, and with the eternal love and goodness within us try to win the world as we are all supposed to do. "Be still and know that I am God" and know those people whom you have really loved.

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